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MOTHER IS A FRESHPERSON:
A STUDY OF POWER IN THE FAMILY

A Thesis Presented

By

BARBARA BROOKS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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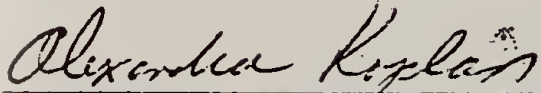
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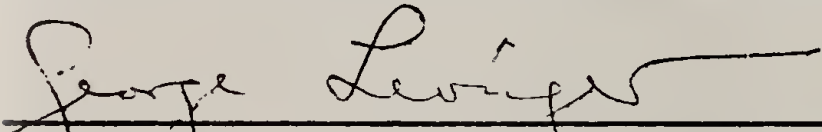
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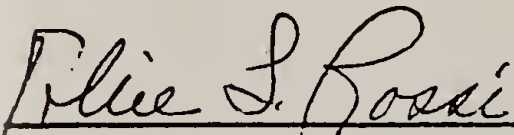
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Increasing numbers of adult women are moving away from their traditional roles, both within the family and in the labor market. They are actively seeking higher status positions which offer a greater degree of economic and personal autonomy (Association of American Colleges, 1978; New York Times, 1977). Nowhere is this trend more sharply seen than in the numbers of women beyond the age of traditional students who are in school (Robinson, et. al., 1973). Between 1970 and 1974, for instance, the college enrollment of women between the ages of 24 and 34 rose from 409,000 to 831,000 -- an increase of 102%. The comparable increase for men of this age was 42% (Van Dusen and Sheldon, 1976).

A significant proportion of these women are wives and mothers to whom student status offers the opportunity for change in their self-concept, commitments and responsibilities (Berkove, 1976). However, as women seek to integrate personal growth with family life they will engage in behaviors which are counter to intrapsychic, interpersonal and cultural expectations. Changes in the women's self-concept -- for example, an increased sense of competence -- frequently introduce the need for change into the family system. Changes in a family system in turn can introduce strain into the marital relationship. A positive resolution of this chain of reactions requires, at the least, that the couple reassess marital roles and re-evaluate public and personal identities. Often, however, the resulting stress on the couples'

relationship leads to increased marital instability and separation (Brandenburg, 1975; Gornick, 1976; Levine, 1974; Manis, 1972; Robinson, et. al., 1973; Berkove, 1976).

The purpose of the present study is to examine the marital relationship of adult women who have returned to school. The present perspective will focus on power as an aspect of family life. To study marital power a reformulation of the concept of power is proposed. In this view, power would have two aspects: control over others and control over self. That is, power would be defined as both dominance and autonomy.

A further objective of the study is to see if marital power struggles are salient for all couples in the study and not just an artifact of the "bad" marriages. Perhaps it is a bad marriage that promotes going back to school, rather than vice versa. The going back to school could provide a focus for the discontent in the marriage and appear to be the cause when in fact it is the consequence (Hass, 1978).

The Returning Women

In my early 30's I enrolled as an undergraduate, a Freshperson: class of '75. Although I had worked outside the home I still felt the need for something -- options, status, personal growth -- things, I concluded, that I could only get from a college education. Without considering the implications or the consequences I enrolled at a local college.

What was more unexpected than my becoming a student at that

point in my life, was the degree and quality of anger, fear, and tension that become an integral part of my relationship with my husband. I wondered why. Well, it was my problem; I wanted to do this crazy thing, what else could I expect? I looked around and saw other returning women: some with baby-food still on their sleeves, some with gray in their hair. We smiled in recognition, waved and stopped to talk. We began to recognize, share, and question our common experience of being a wife, mother, and student. Together we wondered why our returning to school created so many problems.

Most of us felt the need to play Superwoman. We grafted the student role into our busy schedules. What was all the flack about? We didn't understand, but we supported each other, applauded each others' miniscule steps toward independence, and awarded gold stars to one another for academic achievement. And we did excel! We didn't dare not to. For many of us, including myself, the price of economic and personal autonomy was a marriage.

That was several years ago. I still meet with my friends on occasion, but the years have scattered us. The process of integrating a greater degree of personal autonomy with family life was conflictful, the cost high. It was worth it. But I continued to wonder why doing something for "just ourselves," making a commitment to our own personal and professional autonomy was the focus of such intense intrapsychic and marital conflict.

These personal experiences were the starting point into the present inquiry.

Sociological studies and novels¹ on women who have returned to school link marital conflict with the wife's re-entry into school (Brandenburg, 1975; Gornick, 1976; Levine, 1974; Manis, 1972; Robinson, et. al., 1973; Berkove, 1976; French, 1977; Bryant, 1973). Brandenburg (1975), conducted a study of adult women who had returned to a large urban college. She describes the problems confronting the non-traditional women student. She identifies as issues "personal concerns about guilt and dependence, sex discrimination, and career development" (p. 12). Marital conflict and the woman's feelings of guilt and dependent are frequently focused around the domestic issues of housework and time for study.

Many women...face resistance to their return to school from husbands, families, and friends. As soon as the returning student becomes really involved in her schoolwork, some aspects of her life change. The most common change, at least in this group, was a "sacrifice of housekeeping responsibilities and less time for family and friends..." Reports by the women indicate several reaction patterns of husbands and families, ranging from continuous open hostility to continuous support. The experience of continued support was comparatively rare among these women; most experience some degree of resistance to their return to school (p. 13).

As a way of dealing with some of the problems confronting adult

¹Two recent novels offer vivid accounts of the experience of the adult women student. See A Women's Room by Nancy French and Ella Price's Journal by Dorothy Bryant. Ella Price is a working class wife attending a community college in California; the main character in French's novel is the wife of a physician attending a small college in New Jersey. Nevertheless, across the continent and across the social ladder the two women's issues are remarkably similar and conform to the data reported by sociologists and psychologists.

women students Brandenburg initiated a support group called Women Involved In New Goals (WING). Some of the women in the group resolved some of the marital conflict they were experiencing by directly involving their husbands in school. One women reports:

Encouraging my husband to return to school too
has decreased his feeling of threat and his
hostility toward my return to school (p. 14).

Berkove (1976) conducted a questionnaire survey of married adult college women. Of the 361 respondents, 328 had "successfully" returned to school. "Successful" students were able to either complete a degree or teaching certificate within a time span of at least a year and a half from their return to college or to continue taking courses for at least a year and a half. Of this group of "successful" students she reports that 15% are no longer married to the men who had been their husbands when they returned. Furthermore, she reports that an additional 25% of the women report having seriously contemplated divorce or separation since their return and directly link, "Their thoughts of leaving their marriages and their return to school" (p. 9). They had, for the present, opted to remain in marriages that they saw as no longer fulfilling. "They were not necessarily going to divorce their husbands, but were going to 'make do' or go their own way in marriages that they were no longer so deeply committed to" (p. 9).

Furthermore, Berkove reports that about half the women (in the total study) described their husbands as having negative reactions ranging "from anger, jealousy, and withholding of support, to displeasure and annoyance over occasional late meals" (p. 5). About a

third of the ~~women~~ reported that they had lowered their housekeeping standards. However, only 10% of the women...reported that their husbands had lowered their expectations of housekeeping standards as well" (p. 5). (It is interesting to note that a change in the direction of shared housekeeping was not reported.) In addition to conflict around domestic labor, disagreements were reported by the women around issues of financial support and the wives using their time for their own self-development. Berkove suggests that for some couples "tensions regarding household upkeep are symptomatic of deeper conflicts and serious marital discord" (p. 6). She does not attempt to elaborate on what the "deeper conflict" and "serious discord" might be about. She offers the following to illustrate the magnitude of some couples antagonistic behaviors.

I have also found that my doing well in science and ~~math~~ (non-feminine subjects) upsets my husband. He didn't object when I got A's in English -- ~~women~~ are supposed to do well in those subjects. I have mentioned this to him, and of course, he denies it, but he was supportive when I first enrolled and now he isn't. He mentions how much money my education is costing him (even though I've worked part time off and on) and how much time I spend away from the family (he spends as much time away from the family as I do). He has stopped commenting on the state of the house, since I told him that if it was too dirty to suit him, he was welcome to clean it, because it suited me just fine (p. 6).

To alleviate or avoid some of the "predictable marital tensions that arise in conjunction with the wife's return to school" (p. 10), Berkove suggests couples counseling "before as well as during the school experience" (p. 10).

While several studies have attributed the conflict to "role

strain" (Brandenburg, 1975; Berkove, 1976), most do not attempt to address causality. However, the degree of conflict reported seems out of proportion to the amount of role adjustment required of the family by the wife's taking on of the student role.

What these studies do suggest then, is the possibility that the conflict is not really around housework, money or time. Instead, the conflict is likely to be a defensive handling of unarticulated intense reactions by both spouses to the woman's attempts to redefine her values and take control over important aspects of her life. In other words, the conflict is not over the issues themselves; the conflict masks covert struggles over power. Furthermore, it is suggested that these particular issues make an ideal "hiding place" for the covert power struggles.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that these studies imply that power is likely to be the underlying, critical couples' issues for many families of women who have returned to school. Furthermore, it seems to follow that the covert power struggles might be made more explicit if we examine each spouses feelings and actions around the issues that going back to school raise (housework, money, time).

Women's Work

Housework is a critical issue for student wives. Housework is unpaid labor, it has low status and is time consuming. Housewives are economically dependent, have low status, and little time or energy for their own interests.

Recently researchers have begun to study the relationship of

housework to women's secondary status. Beston (1969) in a paper exploring women's relationship to the economic system writes:

The material basis for the inferior status of women is to be found in just this definition of women (as housewife). In a society in which money determines value, women are a group who work outside the money economy. Their work is not worth money, is therefore valueless. And women themselves, who do this valueless work, can hardly be expected to be worth as much as men who work for money (p. 16).

The definition of women as housewife exists even if women are employed outside the home. Boulding (1976) analyzes data from the UNESCO Time Budget Series of families in which both spouses work for wages. The data indicate that women who work outside the home do consistently more household functions than their husbands. In the U.S.A., for example, employed women do more than three times the domestic labor than their husbands (180 minutes to 58 minutes each day). Women do more domestic work even though "women's working hours outside the home are sometimes longer than men's" (p. 12).

Further data suggest that the amount of housework done by husbands of employed women is similar to the amount done by husbands of unemployed wives (Glazer-Malbin, 1976).

Oakley (1974) in a comprehensive study of the housewife role suggests that the intense discontent and conflict regarding household upkeep is related to women's status. Males threatened by relative changes in power vis a vis women are likely to take refuge behind a "women equals housework" position.

Apparently rationality conceals a concern to perpetuate the identification of women with domesticity: "I don't like the dull, stupid, boring jobs so you should do them." The dialogue is amazingly intense and persistent: it is there-

for political, not trivial. The measure of the women-housewife's oppression is the strength of the man-non-housewife's resistance to "real" (not merely theoretical) change (p. 24).

Thus, she indicates the conflict is not over how clean the house is or should be -- but to remind women of their place.

Furthermore, housework and childcare take time and emotional energy. Her role is to act as the provider of emotional warmth and stability for the whole family, to maintain good, tension-free relationships between the family members (Oakley, 1974; Bernard, 1971). Miller (1976) writes "helping in the growth of others without equal opportunity and right to growth themselves is a form of oppression" (p. 40).

Because housework is unpaid labor housewives are economically dependent. Returning women students report that the withdrawal of financial support (for tuition) is associated with their doing well in non-domestic areas, and to their taking their work and themselves seriously. Perhaps the husbands are reacting to feelings of threat; perhaps they are angered by their wife's attitude or behavior.

Regardless of the motivation, the husband asserts his power by dominating his wife. We can postulate that under these circumstances a wife might link a sense of personal power to her capacity to control critical areas of her life. We might also speculate that a reverse dynamic could occur. That is, as a wife attempts to claim some personal power the husband asserts his power through domination.

Power: Dominance and Autonomy

Power we find has two core definitions. The first has to do with

dominance: "A position of ascendance; (the) ability to compel obedience" offers Webster's Third. Dominance is the definition of power traditionally used by researchers of marital power. Dominance power is measured by the amount of control an individual has over the lives of others. The strategies often used to measure dominance have equated power and frequency of decision making in families.¹

The second definition has to do with autonomy: "(the) ability to do or act" says Webster's New World. Autonomy is, I believe, an unrecognized component in the family power dynamic. Autonomous power is measured by the degree of control an individual has over her/his own life.²

¹For a detailed discussion of dominance power and its application to marriage see: Cartwright (1959); French and Raven (1962); Cromwell and Olson (1975); Gillespie (1971); Safilios-Rothschild (1970); Levinger (1976).

²Miller (1976) suggests that the concepts of power, autonomy or self-determination have been distorted through culture and tradition. She further suggests that women are likely to define power in terms of (what I have labeled as) autonomy. Of the dual aspects of power she writes:

In general, for women today, power may be defined as the "capacity to implement." This has not been the meaning of power in the past. Power has generally meant the ability to advance oneself and simultaneously, to control, limit, and if possible, destroy the power of others. That is power, so far, has had at least two components: power for oneself and power over others (p. 116).

The idea of self-determination, for dominant groups, has been built on a base that included pari passu, the restriction of another group. This is not self-determination in a pure state but a concept that has acquired connotations extrinsic to its real nature -- signs of another hidden process (p. 115-116).

Following this thought, I would like to suggest the following: individuals can participate with equal or greater frequency in decision making but still be without the "capacity to implement" changes in their own lives. For example, most often wife's decision making concerns the psychological, emotional and nurturance needs of others. However, critical decisions concerning the gratification of her own needs, for instance, whether a wife goes to work or not, are often made by the husband (Blood and Wolfe, 1960).

Thus, I propose here a model of power that includes and delineates the concepts of both autonomy and dominance. It is important to note that autonomy is qualitatively different from "freedom from domination." One can be free from domination because one dominates others. However, the concept of autonomy need not include the desire to dominate. On the other hand, autonomy does not have to be a stance of total isolation. Ideally, autonomous power can include degrees of mutual strength, cooperation, affiliation, and interdependence. However, we might well speculate that in the real world both aspects of power will be intricately linked. In all probability to study either aspect of power we will, at times, have to force an artificial separation between the two.

The inclusion of autonomy in the power paradigm is not totally new. We can observe that autonomy, i.e., the right to self-control is recognized as an important aspect of political power; states and nations do engage in intense struggles over the right to self-determination. (We can also observe that the issues appear to be more salient for the oppressed. We can speculate that dominant groups

tend to take autonomy for granted and fail to recognize the importance of the experience of being without it.)

Recently, researchers have begun to recognize the political nature of family life (Miller, 1974; Laing, 1969; Cooper, 1970; Chesler, 1972; Gillespie, 1971; Rossi, 1964). These authors observe that the socialization process, intra-psychic development, marriage contracts, and the sexual division of labor structurally curtail women's capacity to control their own lives. Thus, it seems appropriate to include both aspects of power in an exploration of conjugal power relationships.

One final comment about power per se. Power, whether formulated in terms of autonomy, dominance, or a combination of both has two important qualities. On one level, power is a socio-cultural characteristic; on a deeper level it is an intrapsychic dynamic. That is, power is both a position from which we interact with the world, and a way we view ourselves. These two qualities of power and their impact on conjugal relations will be presented in the following section. Many of the ideas presented are germinal and are intended only as an introduction.

Power as a socio-cultural characteristic. The following explores marital power relations within the broader cultural context. The present perspective is mindful of the capitalistic-patriarchal influences on our culture. An examination of these influences is likely to provide an important advance towards illuminating the complexities of marital power.

Under patriarchy the male's right to power has been institu-

tionalized and supported by tradition and societal norms. Power is ascribed to males over females regardless of the males' abilities, role, or status. Historian Kelly-Gadol (1976) writes:

Although women may adopt the interests and ideology of men of their class, women as a group cut through male class systems. Although I would quarrel with the notion that women of all classes, in all cultures, and at all times are accorded secondary status, there is certainly sufficient evidence that this is generally, if not universally, the case. From the advent of civilization, and hence of history proper as distinct from prehistorical societies, the social order has been patriarchal (p. 813).

Both sexes are socialized to view power of the dominant group as interpersonal dominance. That is, patriarchal power is likely to be seen in terms of: if I win, you lose (Miller, 1976). Given this dichotomous framework, one is either dominant or subordinate. Therefore, as women seek autonomy and move out of the subordinate role the only position which is seen as available is the dominant role. And one aspect of this assumed dominant role is interpersonal power. From this perspective it is likely that both sexes will be particularly sensitive to a woman's incipient independence. They are likely to view the female's strivings for autonomy as containing the potential to dominate.

The assignment of status and power by sex has further implications for female-male relations. Frequently to protect the ascribed position of dominance, there arises in men the need to maintain the illusion of innate superiority (Janeway, 1973; Firestone, 1970; Millet, 1969). In "traditional" families the simultaneous devaluation of the female and enhancement of the male is clear (Rubin, 1976).

But it exists also in "modern" families -- in covert and complex forms. For example, in these families, a husband often assumes an executive role with his wife. In middle class families, in particular, this entails an overt "egalitarian" attitude and at the same time a subtle campaign of deprecation of her talents, ability and intelligence (Safilios-Rothschild, 1976, 1970; her term for the executive function is "orchestration" power). This results in drastically limiting the control a woman has over her own life and limits her ability to see in herself the autonomous, competent human being she may be.

Men also adopt a "take charge" relationship with women because they perceive women as expecting them to do so. (This perception is probably correct in some situations and not in others.) If a man wants to get a favorable evaluation from a woman he assumes that he must behave in a way that conforms to her expectations of what a man is and does. As a result, the socialization and attitudes of women help perpetuate the preeminence of males (Hass, 1978).

Finally, because of patriarchal "belief" in male superiority, males and females often acquire from an early age the expectation that others, i.e., women-mothers, are required to serve males. From the males position of privilege it is probably that a woman's claim to power, to equality and autonomy, may appear to males as an objective loss, a giving up of services. Women also, are likely to have ambivalent feelings about giving up the "serving" aspects of their wife-mother role.

The female, in contrast, has not belonged to the group that learned it needed subordinates. Consequentially, female socialization is directed towards the passive, nurturant and dependent role (Miller, 1976). Under patriarchy female power exists primarily in relationship to children. However, even this power is transitory. The primary goal of the female role is to assist children to adulthood and independence. In reality though, the relationship often fills the needs of the mother instead of the child. We have not found good ways to foster movement from unequal to equal. We worry about how much power the child is to have, how many "rights" we should allow. The trouble that women (as primary childrearsers -- but parents in general) may have with this relationship is the fact that it exists within the context of a kind of power that teaches us to enforce inequality (Miller, 1976).

Furthermore, women who reject passivity, who select direct dominant forms of power are likely to be seen as more masculine and therefore less acceptable (Johnson, 1974). It is not surprising, then, that what women most often learn about power is that they shouldn't have it. Nor is it surprising that women learn to deny their own power or that they resort to disguised and indirect ways of acting and reacting. From this perspective, we can speculate that a woman's claim to her own autonomy will be conflictful and is likely to contain negative intrapsychic consequences. Women who perceive themselves as having or taking power are likely at some level to question their femininity.

I recognize that the lives of men are also constricted by their

socialization: by the need to conform to a patriarchal stereotype that dictates they be dominant. If men accept the power given to them it may be at a loss of interpersonal and affectional satisfaction -- or, if they reject the status and power assigned to males it may be at some loss of self-esteem. For example, there are negative psychological consequences to a male's sense of himself which arise from the expectation (of both males and females) that males will be "men" and as such assume a position of leadership. This expectation is particularly destructive because it exists within the context of an economic system which structurally deprives most individuals from assuming positions of authority. In addition, a male's need to appear powerful, rational and to deny feelings will probably diminish his capacity to care about, and be actively involved in intimate relationships.

Moreover, there are negative consequences for males who reject the masculine equals power stereotype. These men are likely, at some level, to question their masculinity. However, a more detailed exploration of the implications of these negative consequences are beyond the scope of this paper.

Power as an Intrapsychic Dynamic. Socio-cultural expectations concerning power fail to recognize the importance of unconscious wishes and fantasies. A psychoanalytic perspective seems to be an important step towards a fuller understanding of the complexities of conjugal power. The following presentation is based, for the most part, on recent papers attempting an integration of feminist and

psychoanalytic perspectives.

Basic personality characteristics and intrapsychic constructs are formed in the family as a direct result of the child's experience of her/his relations to the mother and father. The family, in turn, is shaped by the demands of the immediate social milieu which they represent. That is, it is in the interplay between patriarchal structure and values, and the families intrapsychic dynamics that an infant's personality and psychic life are formed. However, these forces combine in different ways so as to create different experiences and therefore different psychic constructs for female and male children.

Gender-linked intrapsychic constructs and gender identity begin in the preoedipal stage with mother childrearing, are solidified in the oedipal stage, and are fortified and reinforced throughout adolescence and adulthood. I would speculate that gender-linked intrapsychic constructs and the ways in which they were acquired will most likely lead males and females to have different associations to the meaning of power.

The following discussion will first attempt to point out some possible associations between patterns of early childrearing, gender-linked views of power, and the subsequent need to keep women "powerless." Second, it will attempt to present some possible associations between a child's oedipal experience and her/his subsequent preference for power through dominance or autonomy.

Recent research has begun to examine the cultural, economic and intrapsychic effects of the fact that women universally have been

primarily responsible for early childrearing (Beston, 1969; Chodorow, 1974; Lerner, 1974; Dinnerstein, 19). The critical issues that emerge focus on the preoedipal girl's and boy's experiences of dependence and affiliation in relationship with or in opposition to the mother. In addition, this theory on the development of the unconscious aspects of personality suggests that a relationship exists between an infant's internalized powerful mother imago and the subsequent (unconscious) need in males to devalue and dominate women and in women to be devalued and dominated. In other words, in each of our unconscious' we carry the "aura" of the nursery. In our struggles to achieve independence and autonomy it becomes necessary to shackle and make powerless that female ghost of our memories. However, the implications for men and women are likely to differ as they engage in their intimate relations with the current representative of that early primary object.

Chodorow (1974) points out two important elements in the preoedipal development of masculine and feminine personality based on differences in mothering a female or male infant. With a daughter the mother develops a double identification. She identifies with her own mother and through her daughter re-experiences herself as a cared for child. Thus, mothers are less likely to help their daughters to differentiate and become independent. On the other hand, mothers tend to identify less with their sons, and are more likely to encourage them to assume greater independence and the taking on of the male role in ways that are unsuitable for such a young child. Thus, from early on young boys learn that affection is earned through

independence. Further, the kinds of affectional ties sons build with mother are weaker than ties she has with her daughter. From this perspective males come to associate independence and love. Males need to act independently for women to love them. We can speculate that as wives claim their own autonomy, develop their own interests and move away the male's basic dependency needs will become more obvious. As they become obvious males are likely to assume that women will love them less. As a result of this chain of events it is likely that males, as a defensive reaction against feared loss of love, will respond with fear, anger and rejection.

Second, Chodorow notes that because fathers are not actively involved in early child care boys come to learn their masculine identity through a "positional" identification with an absent person. What this means for the small boy is that he formulates his sense of his maleness by that which is not mother. Incorporating into his sense of self any female qualities is made difficult because there isn't any clearly defined masculine traits to offset them. Thus, he must deny a sense of himself that is "feminine" and devalue that which is seen as "female" in the external world.

It is in the context of vague affiliation with the mother and impoverished ties to the father that males form their identity and define themselves. Thus, to be a male means, in part, to become independent and to do so on your own. If males assume that women will follow a similar path, it is likely that a wife's steps toward self-definition, towards a more independent and autonomous self will be experienced by males as containing a potential rejection of them

and of the relationship.

Women, however, have from early on learned to understand their own sense of themselves and their independence as occurring within the context of close affiliation with the mother and women in general. Thus, becoming an autonomous and self directed individual need not mean giving up one's ability to nurture, learn from, and to develop within the context of deep meaningful relationships (Miller, 1976). From this perspective wives are unlikely to understand their husbands defensive reaction to what they (the husbands) perceive as a potential rejection.

Lerner (1974) suggests that contrary to traditional psychoanalytic theory, in which the devaluation of women is attributable to her penis-less state, intense hatred is directed toward women as a "defensive handling of the powerful and persistent effects of early infant-mother relationships." The profound effects aroused by the child's helpless dependence on an all powerful maternal figure have continual impact on adult life. She points out that the important dynamic in the understanding of this defensive sexism is to be found in the close relationship that exists between envy and devaluation. Devaluation of an envied object is a typical defensive maneuver, for as long as an object is devalued it need not be envied.

Furthermore, our cultural definitions of what is masculine and feminine reflects an unconscious attempt to replay in adult relations all the nurturant functions of the "good mother." This comes about through a defensive reversal of that early matriarchy. For males, according to Lerner:

A psychic and social situation is created in which the adult male retains the good aspects of mother but is now dominant and in control of a female object on whom, as in the case of his mother, he was initially helpless and dependent; that is his wife...becomes his own child. As long as this defensive reversal of an early dependency situation continues, envy and devaluation of women is subdued or seemingly eliminated; the devaluation of women achieves expression in the reversal itself. (p. 543)

Female children too, experience their mother as a powerful and potentially malevolent figure. Thus, as women, their self experience, need to remain dependent, and their reluctance to define themselves as independent and autonomous is often a reaction formation against their own feared power and destructive potential.

Both Chodorow and Lerner conclude that the active involvement of both parents in childrearing would be necessary in order to defuse the defensive idealization and devaluation of women and to effect changes in the ways in which males and females learn to deal with issues of dependence and affiliation.

Traditional psychoanalytic theory offers little literature on the relationship of the preoedipal stage to the formation of gender identity. According to psychoanalysis it is in the working through and the resolution of the oedipal drama that the young girl and boy solidify their gender identity. Although there is a tendency to see analytic theory as outdated and inapplicable, I believe that the psychic and social dynamics that Freud recognized persist. I would speculate that an exploration of such a comprehensive theory of the self might offer some degree of illumination of the origins of a masculine and feminine conceptualization of power, if they exist.

According to Freud's (1924) theory of the oedipus complex the young boy, between the ages of 3 and 6, becomes aware of the intensity of his sexual desire for his mother. Following his awareness he wants to get rid of his father so he may have his mother to himself. With this wish he becomes frightened of his father. He fears being castrated by this powerful and potentially punitive person. To resolve this dilemma he represses his sexual desire for his mother as well as his hate for his father and accepts the "promise" that one day he will have as an erotic object a woman like his mother. For males the kind of power that involves obedience and control of others is a critical component in the formation of male gender identity.

For young girls, however, the drama is more complex. For a young girl too, the mother is the primary affectional and sexual object. At some point during this developmental stage she must transfer her erotic preferences from her mother to her father (and males in general). Freud hypothesized that this transition occurs when the young girl realizes that her mother does not have a penis and is therefore "inferior." In addition, she realizes that she too, will never have a penis and likewise defines herself as inferior. Resolution of the crisis is made when she realizes that only by sexually possessing a male can she vicariously possess the longed for penis. In analytic theory the cultural devaluation of women is founded on this "biological inferiority."

Whether one accepts or rejects Freud's hypothesis, it can be stated that nowhere in the description of the young girl's oedipal drama is there the analogous threat from powerful others that is

found in the male oedipal drama. Rather, for women the critical element in the formation of gender identity is one of self-definition, albeit, in this instance, a negative one. From this we can speculate that women link a sense of personal power to the "capacity to implement," define, and determine, in a positive way, the course of their existence (Miller, 1976).

In sum, within the complexities of the preoedipal infant-mother relationship, and the oedipal experience some preliminary speculations are offered as to the origins of intrapsychic gender-linked associations to the meaning of power. It is suggested that males will be more likely to view power as interpersonal dominance and females more likely to view power in terms of self-definition. It is further suggested that the family structure in which intrapsychic phenomena is acquired will lead in males to the unconscious need to devalue and dominate women, and in women to the unconscious need to be dominated and devalued. Finally, it is suggested that these early mother-child interactions are a crucial component of subsequent conflict around marital power issues.

Research on Marital Power

The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate some of the ways previous research into marital power has conceptually excluded the concept of autonomous power. A further purpose is to offer the suggestion that this conceptual bias had led to an over-estimation of a wife's power vis a vis her husband.

The "typical" approach to family power outcome research is

illustrated by the following critique of the Blood and Wolfe (1960) study. The presentation is limited in that it focuses on just one aspect of the study: the relative decision making power of each spouse concerning their own work outside the home.

According to "resource theorists" like Blood and Wolfe, power is equated with the degree to which either spouse can effect the outcome of family matters. Blood and Wolfe rely on a sample of eight decisions to provide an estimate of the relative balance of power between husband and wife. The eight decisions are:

1. What job the husband should take.
2. What car to get.
3. Whether or not to buy life insurance.
4. Where to go on a vacation.
5. What house or apartment to take.
6. Whether or not the wife should go to work or quit work.
7. What doctor to have when someone is sick.
8. How much money the family can afford to spend per week on food.

These questions were selected because they are "all relatively important" (p. 19) and "affect the family as a whole" (p. 20). The questions "range from typically masculine to typically feminine decisions" (p. 20).

The researchers report:

Two decisions are primarily husbands province (his job and the car)...the food expenses are preponderantly in the wife's hands...While all the others are joint decisions in the sense of having more "same" responses than anything else (p. 20).

Blood and Wolfe contend that in the contemporary American family the ability to effect decisions is no longer determined by traditional patriarchal norms in which the husband automatically assumes a dominant

role. Instead, power is open to negotiation and is determined, in a large part, by the comparative resources (education, occupation, and income) of the husband and wife.

Not that there is necessarily exact equality between husband and wives in contemporary America but...the predominance of the male has been so thoroughly undermined that we no longer live in a patriarchal system.
(p. 19)

According to the investigators the move away from patriarchy and male dominated decision-making is attributable to women's increased opportunities in education and in the labor market. The more women participate in work outside the home the greater their resources (occupation and income). Higher levels of resources increase the degree to which women can effect the outcome of family matters. Thus, in "resource" terms, the ability to work and marital power are directly linked.

Blood and Wolfe report that in 90% of the families the husband makes the final decision about his own work. In comparison, in 1% of the families the decision is made by the wife. The researchers state:

The husband's work is his chief role in life. From it he derives his greatest sense of well being or malaise, and there he invests the greatest part of his energies. His work is so onesidedly important to him that almost all the wives leave him alone for his final decision. (p. 20)

In contrast to the husband's decision pertaining to his work, in 26% of the families the final decision as to whether the wife should go to work or not is made by the husband. The wife's decision is final in only 39% of the families. The researchers write:

That the husband should be more involved in his wife's job decisions than she with his is understandable. For one thing, her work is seldom her major preoccupation in life the way it is for a man. Even if she worked just as many hours a week, she does not usually make the same life-long commitment to the world of work. Nor is her pay check as indispensable to the family finances (if only because it is usually smaller). In such ways the choice whether to work or not is less vital to a woman than to a man.

In addition, the wife's decisions about working have repercussions on the husband. If his wife goes to work, he will have to help out more around the house. If he is a business executive, he may prefer to have her concentrate her energy on entertaining prospective clients at home. As a small businessman or independent professional, he may need her services in his own enterprise. On the other hand, regardless of his own occupation, he may want her to work in order to help him buy a house or a business or pay for the children's education. (p. 22)

Contrary to Blood and Wolfe, who conclude, "the weight of evidence suggests that the patriarchal family is dead." I would argue that the preceeding two quotes reflect a fundamental inequality between the spouses. That is, while wives frequently make or share decisions concerning family needs (food, doctor, house, vacation) they, unlike their husbands, are frequently without the autonomy to implement critical decisions concerning their own needs (work). The notion of attaining power (as it is defined here); in this particular case need not imply the wish for collateral input into the husband's decision concerning his work. Rather, autonomous power implies the wish to control decisions concerning self -- not others.

The absence of autonomy in an area so directly linked to marital power raises questions as to whether the patriarchal family is indeed

"dead." Furthermore, it raises questions concerning the appropriateness of a model of marital power that focuses on control of others and conceptually excludes control over self -- particularly as it pertains to women.

The present research project offers some initial attempts to incorporate the concept of autonomy into the study of marital power. To highlight the autonomous aspects of power the project focused on marriages in which issues of autonomy are likely to be salient: marriages of adult women who have returned to school.

Only wives were interviewed. Interviewing husbands was beyond the scope of this initial, exploratory investigation. However, it would be an interesting and possibly pertinent area for future research.

For the purpose of this study autonomy was defined as the woman's ability to:

- 1) use family finances for herself as she chooses.
- 2) implement a more equitable distribution of housework and childcare.
- 3) use time for self.
- 4) control her own body sexually.

Some of the questions the study asked: 1) How autonomous did these women feel pre-school? 2) Did they experience changes in their sense of autonomy after they returned to school? Because many marriages split during this time, 3) What were the effects, if any, of changes in a wife's autonomy on the balance of power between the spouses?

In my sample of returning women students, I selected two subsamples, the first women who were still married to the men who were

their husbands when they came back to school and second, women whose marriages broke-up in the course of their school years.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Description of the Respondents

The participants were 15 full-time undergraduate women attending a large university in Massachusetts.¹ Eight of the respondents were still married to the men who had been their husbands when they first came back to school. Seven respondents were women whose marriages terminated after they returned to school. Of these, two marriages were ended by the husband following the wife's first semester as an undergraduate and five were ended by the wife 2 to 3 years after she returned to school.

Women who participated in the study were white. They ranged in age from 28 to 44 with an average age of 34. Twelve women had children. The number of children in the families ranged from 0 to 7. While the average age of the youngest child was in the 6 to 11 year age range, over 25% of the mothers had at least one child under the age of 5. Thirteen of the women had had some formal education following graduation from high school. This training ranged from nine months in nursing school to the completion of an R.N. degree. The women had been basically homemakers. Over half of them had been home full-time the year before they returned to school and had not been involved in volunteer work. Socio-economic status was not formally determined but

¹Data from three additional respondents was incomplete due to equipment failure and were not included in the final study.

husbands and former husbands occupations ranged from unemployed to full professor. Current economic situations ranged from women on welfare to women whose husbands earned upwards of \$20,000.

Procedure

The subjects of the study were chosen from among women enrolled in the University in the winter of 1974. It was anticipated that the time span of two years between date of enrollment -- i.e. January, 1975 -- and date of being interviewed -- i.e. January, 1977 -- would allow for the development of power interactions around school generated issues.

Women were selected for the study according to the following criteria: they were between the ages of 28 to 45, were married at the time of their return to school, not enrolled in University Without Walls (UWW), and carrying nine credit hours or more. Women attending school during the day, rather than through continuing education, women taking more than nine credits and not involved in UWW were selected so as to maximize the likelihood that she had made a strong commitment to her education.

In January 1977, letters were mailed to 49 women. The letter requested the woman's participation in a study exploring the personal and family life of women who had returned to school. In addition, the letter stated that I too, was a returning student (see Appendix A). The intent of the letter was to reach out in a personal way and to establish an open and sharing atmosphere for the interview. A follow up telephone call determined that there were 18 suitable subjects. In addition to these 18, the letter had reached 24 women who did not

meet the established criteria. For example: nine of the women had withdrawn from school during the previous two years (they were analogous to Berkove's "drop-outs"), one woman was not attending school full time, three had graduated, one had transferred to UWW, and seven had been divorced prior to entering school -- despite university records to the contrary. In addition, seven "still married" women over the maximum needed for the study were contacted in the process of locating women who had separated since their return to school. The need for separated respondents was explained and the study described.

Of the women who fit the criteria (25 women: 18 subjects and 7 "overs") not one woman was unwilling to be interviewed. Each was eager to participate despite the understanding that the interviews would take approximately 2 hours and that the only payment would be a summary of the data when the study was completed. Based on my own experience I had expected the women to be interested but I was unprepared for the level of excitement and eagerness most women showed when I telephoned. Clearly this was a salient and important topic for them. Many women wanted to tell of their own experience. However, most women were most interested in finding out what it was like for other women to go back to school.

Data were gathered by means of a semi-structured personal interview. Interviews allowed for in-depth questions with greater freedom of communication between interviewer and respondent. Furthermore, the fact that I too am an adult woman who returned to school and that the respondent and I shared common experience facilitated identification

and communication. Personal interviews, however, presented two potential methodological problems. First was the concern that by forming a relationship with the respondent I might be increasing the likelihood of her reporting answers she thought I would like to hear. The alternative however, of remaining the uninvolved, distant researcher seemed antithetical to the desirability of maintaining openness and reflection on the part of the respondent. To some extent the use of a structured but open-ended interview schedule limited this difficulty. The structured questions allowed for a feeling of spontaneity while simultaneously reducing the likelihood of talking only about some things and ignoring others.

The second methodological concern dealt with the ethics of inducing the respondent to critically examine her life outside the context of a therapy interview. As a clinical psychologist and a feminist I believe that ultimately a critical evaluation of her life will be in a woman's best interest. However, the depth of exploration and self-disclosure was based on the individual woman's willingness to explore personal feelings and events. The respondents were not pushed to disclose more than they seemed willing to do.

The interviews, which lasted approximately two hours were conducted in the woman's home whenever possible. If the woman requested it the interviews were held at the Psychology Clinic at the University. All the interviews were recorded on audio tape and transcribed. In addition to the series of questions (see Appendix B) each woman was asked to complete a few paper and pencil measures on her attitudes towards sex roles. These data were related to a larger

study and will not be reported here.

Before beginning the interview each woman was asked to read and sign a form explaining that she might experience some emotional stress during the interview and that she was free to withdraw at any time during the interview (see Appendix C). At the conclusion of the interview each woman was given the opportunity to ask questions of the interviewer. Most women eagerly accepted the opportunity and asked questions of the interviewer concerning her personal experience as well as questions about the experiences of the other interviewees. Regardless of whether or not the interviewee asked any questions the interview was followed by a discussion of the questions the study was asking and a brief sharing of my experience as a returning student. In addition, the respondent received a brief written statement summarizing some of the studies underlying assumptions (see Appendix D).

The homes I visited reflected the life of the women with whom I talked. Four women in each group was interviewed at home. The separated women usually lived casually and collectively with at least one other adult. The still married women for the most part lived with their families in comfortable private homes. In half of the home interviews young children were present during parts of the interview. An infant was nursed, a child readied for bed, and others allowed to play quietly as the mother and I talked. The mothers were mostly patient and supportive of their children. The relationships between parent and child appeared warm, and caring. Occasionally a mother would become impatient but restrain herself. I assumed that

she felt uncomfortable chastising the child while I was there.

Data Analysis

The data are presented by means of a qualitative analysis. Such a method permits the researcher to preserve and present the essence, complexity and richness of each woman's experience. There was no attempt to test for external or internal validity. For example, if a woman described her marriage as "bad," "failed," "great," or "very, very nice," her view was accepted as valid. Perhaps her husband wouldn't agree. Perhaps her "bad" was another woman's "great." Nevertheless, for her it was whatever it was and it is each person's perceived reality that affects her/his behavior (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970). From this exploratory phase of the work on autonomous power it is hoped that further research can be conducted that would be more amenable to measurable data collection.

Data are organized in terms of post-hoc themes which emerged from the data analysis. Some themes were consistent with theoretical concepts central to this study, others could not have been predicted. For example, the importance that the women placed on their having experienced a previous academic "failure" was unexpected. As an informal "reliability" measure, several colleagues were generous enough to read a few of the transcripts and were in agreement that the concepts and quotations presented in the analysis were the most salient overall.

Data related to marital power came from questions dealing specifically with two components of the definition of autonomy.

These questions were related to family finances (Question A 3, 4), household tasks and childcare (Question D 1). The data generated by questions pertaining to the couples sexual relationship was uneven and will not be reported. That is, while some women talked quite openly most women responded rather superficially. Second, data related to the woman's sense of autonomy emerged from her responses to the following questions: 1) What made you decide to return to school (A 2), 2) How determined do you believe a woman has to be to complete school (C 9), 3) Are you aware of any recent changes in your sense of your self (C 1), and from questions related to her ability to make a commitment to her self-development (C 7, 8).

The selection of particular excerpts for presentation was based on the degree of clarity with which a woman was able to express herself and on how representative her view was. Some women had thought about some issues more than other women and were thus better able to articulate their thoughts and feelings. To maintain the anonymity of the respondents, all names are fictitious and all identifying characteristics have been disguised or deleted.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The following presentation will be divided into three sections. The first section will look at the respondents' autonomy -- pre-school by focusing on their decision to return. The second section will report on changes in autonomy that the women experienced after their return to school. The third section will illuminate the role of autonomy in marital power conflict by examining the couple's adjustment following the wife's return to school. It will focus on 1) family finances, and 2) division of domestic labor.

The data suggest that married and separated couples differ on two important sociological variables -- husbands education and number of children. The relationship between the couples current marital status and the husbands education are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Association of Current Marital Status and
Husband's Education

Number of Couples		
Husband's Education	Married	Separated
High School	0	5
College +	8	2

From the data presented in Table 1 we can see that the more education a husband has the less likely the marriage is to have terminated following the wife's return to school ($\chi^2 + 8.59$; $p < .01$).

The women who remained in their marriages have more than twice as many children than the separated women (21 to 9; $t + 5.763$; $df = 12$; $p < .001$; one married woman has seven children and is partially responsible for the degree of difference).

The implication for the suggested differences between the two groups and the ways in which husbands education and the number of children might have acted as an attraction to the marriage or as a barrier to leaving the marriage will be discussed later.

There was no apparent differences between married and separated respondents based on current age, age at marriage, prior work experience, prior school experience, current academic interest or length of marriage prior to entering school (see Appendix E).

Furthermore, the data indicate that issues of autonomy were salient for most women in much the same way and over similar issues, regardless of whether or not her marriage was subsequently terminated.¹ Moreover, the data demonstrate that power struggles arose in almost all families following the wife's entry into school. Therefore, in the following presentation, data for both groups (married and separated) will be reported together.

¹In a follow-up telephone conversation with each woman I learned that during the year since the first interview there had been two marital separations. These were two of the three women who had reported that their marriages had become unstable or increasingly unstable since their return to school.

Autonomy -- Pre-School

For a married woman the decision to return to school must take into consideration family, marital, and personal needs. To clarify the role of autonomy in the "decision to return" we need to look at the ways her personal needs influenced her decision and what those needs were. We need to gauge how much control the potential student had over her decision, and more importantly, how much control she felt she had.

The data presented in this section was generated by the question: What made you decide to return to school? Based on the data the women were divided into two groups: High -- Low Autonomy. High Autonomy women acted and felt autonomous. Low Autonomy women did not feel autonomous.

All of the women had at least some autonomy. All of the women had felt free to decide that they wanted to return to school; all of them had been able to act on that decision; and all of them had done so "successfully." However, most of the women (11 out of 15) did not feel very autonomous. The prevailing pattern for these participants was of women who, despite their overt behavior, reported feelings ranging from a sense of personal inadequacy to a pervasive sense of being "out of control."

The four High Autonomy women describe their entry into school as the outcome of realistic goal-setting. In general, the most outstanding characteristic of this group was their well defended egos. For the most part they had surmounted, or disassociated from their sense of themselves, feelings connected to painful personal histories,

patriarchal marriages, and long term marital instability. For example, they denied the effects of a parent's early death, laughed inappropriately when discussing a parent's life threatening illness or made contradictory statements concerning their marital roles. An example of the latter would be the following statements by a 28 year old separated respondent. Her decision to return is goal-oriented autonomous, and reflects feelings of "control." She wanted to do work that was meaningful to her and to others. She explains:

It's the whole dead end job and junk. I wasn't feeling gratified at all. The money enters into it but I think more than that I wanted to do something I could be happy doing. That I could feel that I was accomplishing something for me as well as for the other people I was dealing with. That is what motivated me I think more than anything.

Three months after her entry into school her husband left her. "He cleaned out the bank account. I didn't have anything except the apartment I was living in and the stuff that was in the apartment." The husbands leaving was unexpected; and she still is unable to articulate just why it occurred. Until then she had been able to deny what was happening in her marriage and her lack of autonomy. In describing the shock following his leaving, she said,

I was conditioned to being married. You have certain responsibilities when you are married. You can't do this, you can't do that. You must do this. Your husband does what he wants first and you do whatever is left over. I was really locked into that. And I didn't realize it until I got out of it and looked back. WOW.

The marriages of three of the four High Autonomy women were terminated following their return to school.

In contrast, the 11 Low Autonomy women reported experiences surrounding their decision to return that indicated that they felt themselves to be relatively "out of control" over important aspects of their lives. School was not a goal or a means to a goal but rather an escape, or an attempt to gain control for themselves. "I came to school out of desperation, not going to anything positive. It turned out to be real positive. I was just thinking 'Oh my God, I've got to get out of this.' The only thing I could think of was school. So that's what I chose."

Feelings of being out of control appear to be unrelated to family income, the woman's age, or to the number of years she was married prior to entering school (see Appendix F). For example, women who were economically comfortable were as likely to report feeling less autonomous as were women who reported that money was a problem. The data suggest, however, that autonomy is related to 1) marital satisfaction, 2) childcare, and 3) spouse's education.

Feelings of Low Autonomy or "powerlessness" were attributed by three women to the effects of a "bad" marriage, by three women to the overwhelming responsibility and isolation of childcare, by four women to a sense of intellectual incompetence, and by one woman to her struggles with a life threatening illness. "Powerless" women also reported generalized feelings of ennui, specific feelings of "going crazy," and in two cases suicidal ideation. For "powerless" women the decision to return can be seen as the woman's first overt act towards assuming a greater degree of control over a troubling aspect of her life.

1) Marital Satisfaction

It is important to note that two of the three "bad" marriages terminated after the wife returned to school and prior to the interview. The third was terminated after the interview reported here.

The following two examples illustrate the relationship between a "bad" marriage and the inhibition of a woman's personal power. Restrictions of a woman's autonomy within the marital relationship can overshadow any positive characteristics and subsequently lead to feelings that it is a bad marriage. On the other hand, a marriage might be unsatisfactory for many other reasons. This dissatisfaction can make a woman aware of the limitations on her personal power outside the marriage in terms of finding alternative income, partners, etc. She can then project that external powerlessness back on to the marriage.

In the following example the respondent, a 31 year old single mother of a young child talks about her "failed marriage," and feelings of desperation and powerlessness that led to her return to school.

I was married and I was real unhappy. It wasn't a rational decision (to return to school). I just knew I had to do something. So I started going to school. Feelings of a failed marriage are all closely tied up to the feelings I felt when I started going to school. I really can't separate them out...Then I started feeling good. Then I left my husband.

What made the feeling good?

Oh, just that I was doing things I wanted. Taking control of my life. A realistic control of it. I guess, making my own decisions.

In what way did you do that?

Making decisions that I wanted to pursue a course of study. And all the routines I had to go through to get into school. The things I did weren't all that spectacular but they took an awful lot of pushing, of moving around to get them done. I feel like I've done a lot. And part of it is school and part of it is just standing on your own two feet.

I believe that this example reflects the importance of autonomous power. This woman did not have a lack of power in the traditional sense. She had primary responsibility for decisions affecting child-care and household tasks. She had control over others. She didn't feel that she had control for herself. The example further reflects on how feelings of autonomy can impact on the marital relationship.

In the following example marital struggles over dominance and autonomy are overt. I believe this to be a particularly fine example of the marital power dynamics we wish to explore.

Susan, 33, is a vibrant, strong woman. She is deeply involved in research. She spent one semester in college following graduation from high school, did poorly, became pregnant, got married and dropped out of school. At the time of the interview and during the previous two years her husband's employment has taken him out of town for weeks at a time with very brief periods home between trips. This leaves Susan with sole responsibility for herself and the children. After years of being "depressed, dependent, and a typical neurotic middle class housewife" it is an arrangement that she approves of. It is the way that she maintains her autonomy. We need to note here that hers is a form of autonomy that can only occur in isolation. It does not include mutual strengths, cooperation, affiliation, and inter-

dependence.

When she was first married Susan colluded with her husband in establishing a relationship in which he was the dominant partner.

She explains:

When we were first married I was a very willing doormat. Anybody willing to take care of me could happily have the job. And my way of paying him for that was to do whatever he wanted. So he made every decision in our marriage, in terms of spending money or borrowing money, where we lived. Everything. The two decisions I made was to have my two children.

In actuality the first pregnancy was not really a decision. It occurred because the couple had been having intercourse without birth control, although they had not considered the consequences of their actions. However, Susan takes the responsibility for and the control over that decision. The second child was conceived when Susan flushed her pills down the toilet. She reports that she did that because her husband was opposed to having another child because he didn't like to look at her when she was pregnant. However, despite what she said about only making two decisions she did decide to go back to school and I wondered why. She reported:

I was the typical neurotic middle class housewife sitting around the house with nothing to do and I was really depressed by it, really upset by it. To the point where I had no friends, couldn't make any, couldn't do anything. I was probably having a nervous breakdown. I was really in bad shape: drinking a lot, gaining weight, doing nothing. I joined a woman's group. The upshot of that was that I went back to school. Part of my decision was based on the fact that my husband had gone back to school (the year before). Otherwise I would have been afraid to go back.

Susan continued to discuss why she went back to school and why she would have been afraid to if her husband had not also decided to enter school. She states:

I know that one of the things that was a large part of it (the fear) was Frank's and my relationship was very lopsided. He was very strong, very demanding. He very much needs to have power and he was very good at putting me down. I realize that now.

Frank needs to have power over her because he is threatened by her procreative ability, her intellectual potential, and her sexuality. In describing an incident involving Frank's reaction to the scores on her graduate school entrance exams, she explains,

He was greatly relieved that my GRE scores were lower than his. He couldn't hide his pleasure. Absolutely. I was crumbling. I was absolutely devastated by my GRE scores not by how they related to his. And his response was that they were lower than his.

In another communication, she expressed and proffered her own spontaneous explanation for Frank's fear of her sexuality and its relation to his need for power over her.

In terms of power, he had always told me, since the time we were married, that his biggest fear was that I would have an affair with someone. And I think that probably, in a large part, was why he had such a huge thumb on top of me. He was so afraid I would find somebody better than him. Somehow escape. Though little did he know that escape was the last thought in my mind.

On another occasion she stated:

I've always been very freely loving, very freely sexual. When we were first married, when I was pregnant, I first felt Frank trying to dampen that. And I allowed myself

to be dampened. I resented it more than I knew. I resented that if I wanted to be as freely sensual, sexual as I am he experienced me, and I felt like, a whore or a harlot. I couldn't be good and sensual. I had to be kinky or weird. I had to wear black stockings. I couldn't just be freely sexual.

Susan too, is afraid of the destructive potential of her power. When she is with Frank she assumes the passive dependent role to his autocratic posturing. It is only when he is gone and she is alone that she can allow herself to act and feel powerful. She reports the changes in her sense of herself in the following way:

I just recently believed that I can be independent. In every sense: financially, emotionally. I guess I'm believing in my own strengths. I don't allow him to control me anymore. I control myself. This is equalizing because he has always controlled himself. He's always done what he wanted to. I've never told him to be in by 10 or no, you can't go out with the boys. Whatever he wanted to do he's been free to do. I'm perfectly willing for him to do what he wants to do.

We can interpret Susan's emphasis on the "him" in the final sentence as both a reflection of her difficulty in accepting her autonomy and of her feelings that Frank does not want her to have the independence that he has.

In addition to the pressures of marital dissatisfaction many women expressed concerns over the amount of childcare responsibility that they had. The following illustrates the relationship between "powerlessness" and childcare.

2) Childcare

The association of childcare responsibility, as determined by the number of children under the age of 10 with the degree of personal

autonomy a woman reported is shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Association of Autonomy and Childcare

Number of Children		
Age of Child	High Autonomy (N=4)	Low Autonomy (N=11)
Under 10	3	14
10 +	6	7

There are 11 Low Autonomy women. They have a total of 21 children. At the time they entered school they had 14 children under the age of 10. High Autonomy women have a total of nine children. Three were under the age of 10 when their mothers entered school. From the data presented in Table 2 we can see that the greater the number and the younger the children the less likely the woman is to feel autonomous ($\chi^2 = 2.475$; $p < .10$).

We can see from the above that for mothers of young children feelings of "powerlessness" and the lack of autonomy is very real. Their emotional freedom and their lives were restricted by having primary responsibility for child rearing. Several women reported that they had not been able to consider their own needs until their youngest child entered kindergarden.

The following example presents the experience of a mother of young children and looks at the ways in which her life was focused

on the needs of others.

The respondent, Elaine is 28, a humanities major, married, and the mother of two young children. Like most of the women in the low autonomy group she had at least one child under the age of six. Elaine had completed a semester of school before getting married. She dropped out of school in order to follow her husband in the pursuit of his career. After several years of being home she returned to school gradually: one course in Continuing Ed, then two courses the following semester. She received three A's and wanted more -- education and "well done." The following semester she enrolled full time at the University. It pleases her to know that when she graduates she will be the first in her family of origin to do so. But that's getting ahead of ourselves. In the following Elaine tells of the frustration she felt being home alone with the children.

It's so difficult for me to put this into words because I thought about things then, but not the way I see them now. I know that I felt very frustrated.

I remember sitting at the top of the stairs in our house. The kids were outside in the sandbox. It was the year before I went to school. (I was) crying and crying real loud because nobody was in the house; nobody could hear me. And I knew what was wrong, but there was really no way to get out of there. I had these little kids. What could I do with them? They were too little to go to school. I felt really bad for myself. There was a lot of self-pity and just feeling "what's going to happen to me? I can't see anything. It's like I'm in a fog. There is no focus to my future. I don't know what's going to happen to me."

I believe the fifth sentence: "I knew what was wrong, but there was really no way to get out of there," expresses the feeling of

being without control that was often reported by mothers of young children. It also reflects the importance of looking at autonomy if we wish to get a more accurate picture of woman's power. To sum, thus far, the data indicate that women are likely to link a sense of personal power with their capacity to control the amount of child-care responsibility and with some degree of marital satisfaction. In the following we will examine the third component of a woman's feelings of autonomy: her feelings of competence as determined by the spouses comparative levels of formal education.

3) Spouses Education

The association of "powerlessness" with the level of education the husband has completed is shown in Table 3.¹

Table 3

Association of Autonomy and Comparative Levels
of Spouses Education

Number of Women		
Husband's Education	High Autonomy (N=4)	Low Autonomy (N=11)
High School	3	2
College +	1	9

¹Husband's education is determined by the degree attained. Husbands who had spent a semester or two in post secondary school but had not received any degree were included in the high school classification.

Of the 11 Low Autonomy women, nine report that their husbands had at least a Bachelors degree. In fact, their husbands were a highly educated group of men. Two husbands held Doctorates and five had Masters degrees. Of the four High Autonomy women, one reports that her husband had at least a Bachelors degree. Although he had never completed his doctorate he had been a professor and was now a well known public official.

From the data presented in Table 3 we can see that the more education a husband has the greater the likelihood the wife feels a lack of personal power ($\chi^2 = 4.283$; $p < .05$). Lower comparative levels of education left wives with generalized feelings of incompetence, or that she had "forgotten how to think," or that she "was dumb." A thirty year old married woman reports the following feelings concerning her intellectual abilities.

I came back with the fact that I had to prove to myself that I could do it. And I've proved that I can and I think that has helped me an awful lot. Because I came to school thinking I was dumb and not as smart as people my age. My husband is very intelligent and he is surrounded by college professors, people with Masters and Ph.D.'s. I felt the inability to communicate effectively with them. I came from a completely different environment. I was in a foster home when I was young. Academics or education was not highly valued. It was more (for a man) get a job and you're O.K. (For a woman) get married and have kids. So I grew up with that attitude.

I believe that this statement reflects the importance that feelings of competence are likely to play in the development of autonomy. If an individual feels incompetent she or he would not be likely to want to have responsibility for herself/himself, and indeed, would probably

be glad to give that responsibility to someone else. I believe that was reflected in Susan's earlier comment: "Anybody willing to take care of me could happily have the job."

Women low in autonomy prior to their return were likely to be married at the time of the interview. This raises several questions. First, did the women feel or believe themselves to be as "powerless" as I have presumed them to be? And even if they did, are those feelings psychologically distressing? To have someone take care of you is not necessarily bad. Second, perhaps school changed the way a woman felt about herself, opened new areas for the couple to talk about, and in general created a more satisfactory marriage. Third, perhaps some women need to feel even more autonomous in order to consider terminating a marriage. Finally, perhaps some husbands need to see wives being more autonomous before they can consider terminating the marriage.

The critical place of competence in the development of autonomy behooves us to examine the woman's educational experience prior to returning to school. An examination of that earlier experience might help illuminate why the imbalance in the husband/wife educational levels had such a negative impact on the woman's sense of personal power.

Ten of the 15 respondents reported that they had enrolled in college after graduation from high school but had been unable to complete their education. Whatever the individual woman's reasons were for dropping out: financial, personal, or academic -- it was my impression that each had internalized the experience and frequently saw herself as a "failure" and intellectual incompetent. Their

lack of formal education was an important intrapsychic dynamic and they were particularly vulnerable to any discrepancy within the marital system along the dimensions of education.

In the following example the respondent, a 33 year old married woman, talks about her "failure" and how it makes her feel.

When I came out of high school I went into nursing school. I left without flunking out but they said "you're not cut out to be a nurse." So after nine months I left. It was kind of a shock to me that I failed. After, I picked up a couple of part-time jobs and then decided I would go to business school. I completed that. But I never felt quite competent in that. I would like to feel I know how to do something well. I do an awful lot of things but I would really like to feel that I could do one thing and know in depth one specific thing.

Women who felt like the above respondent tended to yield to their educated husband's more "informed" opinions and ideas. Thus, when they returned to school, learned that they could think, and that their ideas and opinions were respected. The effects on themselves and on the marriage tended to be profound. The women who entered school with an intellectual "inferiority complex" frequently had a marked change of self-concept and behavior. These personal changes subsequently had an impact on the previously established pattern of the marital relationship. For example, one couple completely switched domestic roles, another couple separated because he would not listen to her opinions which she had come to regard as worthwhile.

In contrast, High Autonomy women, even if they had experienced an earlier academic "failure," were usually married to men who had had similar academic experiences. Thus, for these couples there was

no discrepancy between the spouses concerning formal education. Interestingly, the pattern holds for the High Autonomy-College + women. This woman, prior to her return to school had had professional training for which she holds a degree. In addition, she has an important elected role in her community's government and from that she derives status on her own. Based on this data we can speculate that in comparison to their spouses High Autonomy women did not "need" to feel less competent and were therefore able to feel more autonomous.

Thus, prior to returning to school all the women in comparison to their spouses had lower or equivalent levels of formal education. What happens then, when the wife's entry into school gives her a higher level of education? From the data presented in Table 3 it can be seen that five women fall into this category. The five women who had husbands that did not attend college were all divorced after the wife returned to school. Data on the fate of these women support the speculation that this "non-traditional" imbalance leads to increasing marital instability. The women reported that their husbands felt threatened by their increasingly divergent values and expectation. Further, the women reported that they became unhappy with the couples inability to communicate.

In sum, in this section we have looked at the respondents behavioral and psychological autonomy prior to her return to school. We have seen that the women fall into two groups: A small group of women who both act and feel autonomous, and larger group who do not feel autonomous. This latter group suggest that women's autonomous feelings are circumscribed by the effects of a bad marriage, child-

care responsibility, and by having less formal education than her husband.

In the following section we will look at the ways in which women's autonomous power changes after returning to school.

Autonomy -- Post Return

Many women reported that they began to experience, strive for, act on, and value an increased sense of autonomy. The respondents reported changes in the way they saw themselves and in their ability to function more autonomously within their family and in the outside world. They reported changes in their sense of their own competence and self-confidence.

Grades were frequently cited as the critical element that helped to surmount feelings of incompetence and non-assertive way of relating to the world. Grades gave each woman a sense of respect, professional identification and independence. Grades offered confirmation of her worthiness in ways that unpaid labor; i.e. housework could not.

In the following example a woman, 43, married, and mother of seven, talks about her feelings of autonomy in the following way:

I think in the past I didn't feel as good about myself as I do now. I'm doing thing for myself and I'm enjoying it. In the past I never felt I should do anything for myself. I was concerned about others because I had a large family. Since I am now doing things for myself and enjoying it I feel a lot better about myself. I think I can contribute some of the skills or talents or whatever I have. Whereas, before I would rarely venture forth with anything. I just wouldn't feel that my opinions were that worthwhile. Now I think they are as good or sometimes better than somebody else's. So I do feel a better sense of myself: a feeling of competence.

At this point we can only guess what will happen to this woman's commitment to herself and her independence. It can remain incipient and untested; she can act on it and the family system can be flexible enough to accomodate her autonomy or it can be inflexible and resistant to change. In the latter case it is likely that either she or the system will fall apart.

Some of the women reported a radical shift from their husbands to themselves as to who had the "right" to control them. Frequently this shift was a recent development, tenuous, and untested. Sometimes, however, the woman's claim to her power was angry and vindictive.

The following is an example of a woman who had "taken" her power and was angry at the price the struggle cost her: her children.

Paula is a 40 year old woman recently separated from her husband and her teenage children. In her mid-thirties she underwent radical surgery and her "own personal confrontation with death." Looking for something to relieve the depression she enrolled in school. Her husband promised his support. However, as she began to set new priorities and feel more in control, she reported that he became anxious. We need to recognize that Paula reported that there were no drastic changes in her life. She continued to do all the domestic work, be a wife and mother. She only began to think of herself as more autonomous. As a defensive reaction her husband returned to school. Paula became furious that his obligations to school were then seen as a legitimate way for him to avoid taking on additional responsibilities as he had promised. Instead she was expected to put her schooling aside. They struggled. She left. Now when she looks back she recalls

her feelings of autonomy in the following way:

There was a time when I would have honored his wishes. No way could I have done anything I wanted to.

Later I would have done anything that would have conflicted with his wishes.

In the final example a wife begins to feel and take her autonomy seriously. The example demonstrates how resistant the existing balance of power is to redistribution.

A 30 year-old woman, the mother of two young children talks about her lack of autonomy before and just after her return to school in the following way:

In the beginning even though I put up a real big verbal fight I wouldn't do anything that would go against his wishes. But I always made him feel rotten for it. So we both wound up feeling very bad.

As she began to feel better about herself she tried to avoid falling into the "old" power struggles. Her way of doing that was to reverse roles. She states:

After a while I began to do things he totally disapproved of.

When she was able to act with some degree of autonomy her marriage fell apart. Or, it wasn't until the marriage seemed to be in such a sorry state that she was able to take some power for herself. She explains,

That last semester that I was in school, while we were still together, I just wrote a check for the tuition. We had a joint checking account and I just wrote it. Even though he had expressly said "you can't do it." He owed it to me.

I believe that statement reflects the autonomous power of an adult married woman. It is not an attempt to control others. It is power for one's self.

In sum, in this section we have looked at some of the ways women's feelings of autonomy change after they return to school. We have seen that changes occur in feelings of competence, and in the ability to feel and act more autonomously.

In the following section we will examine the relationship between changes in a woman's autonomy, marital conflict and marital cohesiveness.

Pair Adjustment Around Two Critical Issues

This section will examine conjugal power in terms of both dominance and autonomy, focusing on conflicts around 1) money, and 2) housework. The purpose is threefold: to identify evidence of women's "powerlessness," to see if a wife's autonomy is perceived to be a threat, and to look at the degree to which women feel a need to claim control over their own lives.

Conjugal power struggles most often took the form of open conflict between the partners or rebellion by the wife to the husband's more powerful role position. Sometimes, however, the struggle was hidden as one or both spouses withdrew and distanced themselves within the relationship.

Open conflict frequently arose when husbands felt threatened by their wives growing sense of competence, self-confidence, claims to her autonomy, and by the decreasing emphasis she gave to the marriage

as the core of her identity. As a defensive reaction the husband withdrew the support that he had initially given. In other marriages wives acquired new expectations for male-female roles and demanded that their husbands acknowledge their (the wife's) right to greater autonomy and equality. In a third kind of situation the wife, pressured by the requirements of and the conflict between the student-wife-mother roles, requested that her husband assume greater responsibility around the house.

Covert conflict frequently followed a pattern in which women insisted that they had a "good" marriage and that school had not had much of an impact on the marital relationship. However, they also reported that they had gone to work to pay for their tuition, did not talk to her husband about what she was studying nor had she discussed with him her plans for graduate school. Thus, the issues were salient but denied; the conflict incipient and avoided by denial and accommodation.

Finally, in some marriages while there was no apparent increase of conflict between the partners, the wife withdrew, became less tolerant of being in a marriage that had just "sat there" for many years.

Conflict focused around two issues. The most crucial involved money. Without money you simply cannot go to college. Thus, women either had to have access to the wages their spouses earned, find independent resources, or work for wages themselves.

The second area of conflict arose around the division of household labor. However this conflict was minimal and was most frequently

resolved when the wife dropped her former housekeeping standards and "let the house go to hell" rather than pursue what seemed to her to be an unending battle for cooperation.

In the following we will look at the couples' relationship and power struggles around the issues of money and housework. Money is the most critical and we will start there.

Family Finances

The following discussion will focus on only one aspect of the family finances, that is the one in which the woman's claim to power generated a power struggle around the issue of tuition. In the cases presented the power dynamic is very apparent. As the wife redefined her self-concept and began to take herself seriously, the husband pulled rank and snapped the purse strings closed.

The first example is an extreme case both in the degree of control the husband had and in the wife's solution.

Karen, 37, is articulate, flamboyant, a humanities major and the mother of two teenagers. She is recently divorced. Karen and her husband had been clearly affluent. However, any detailed knowledge of their economic resources had been withheld from her. Indeed, her husband had signed her name to their income tax returns. Karen reports that trying to do everything that was expected of her, always trying to please her husband, and always having to pretend to be happy with her role had cost her her self-confidence. She thought that there was surely something wrong with her because she wasn't happy in her role as wife and mother. She reports that when she first

entered school her husband was not opposed to the idea; "he seemed to think, well, it's alright." However, when she began to change, his support changed. She explains:

But then he started resenting it. He resented the fact that I was getting independent. I was getting more independent and I wasn't clinging to him and the house. He was hostile to the whole thing. If supper wasn't ready at a certain time (he would say), "it's just because you're going to school!" He would let the kids know that. He caused a lot of disagreements and it upset me a lot.

Note the second sentence, in which Karen talks about the threat that her feeling independent had on her husband. Given the dominance/submissive nature of their relationship it is apparent why her feelings were disruptive to the relationship. It is also important to recognize that at this point there were no overt changes in their pattern of relating or in the balance of power.

Karen reports that her feelings changed because she met other women who had gone back to school. These women told her that they had gone through the same things and had had similar feelings. Now they said they didn't feel that they had to be "home 24 hours a day cleaning, cooking, and looking after their children." Karen said this helped her to feel "not so different," easier with herself and more self-confident. She began to see herself as capable of defining for herself who and how she should be. No longer did she feel that she had to pretend to herself and to others, that she was completely and exclusively devoted to her children, her husband and his career.

Because she no longer conformed to the role that her husband demanded of her, Karen reports that he refused to pay for school. She

was economically oppressed and unable to directly confront this event. She reports that she dealt with this dilemma in the following way.

When he used to be out drinking he would come home at night like 3 in the morning. He didn't know how much money he had in his pocket, ever. And I would just go in and take out 20, 40, 50 dollars at a time. He would never even know it was missing. It's awful to say. It's really a terrible thing.

Is this autonomy -- or sublime dominance in which the other person doesn't even recognize that they are being used and controlled? I don't know. I will leave each reader to decide for herself/himself.

Excellent grades, academic approval and the receipt of a coveted scholarship supported Karen's new sense of herself. Subsequently she filed for divorce. She explained her reasons for the divorce in the following way:

Being married wasn't worth it. What I was doing for myself was more important than my marriage at that point. I had already gone through the part where my marriage was most important.

Karen reports that alimony, child support, scholarships and loans give her a greater degree of economic autonomy than she was able to experience as a wife.

The following case illustrates a more autonomous resolution to a power struggle in which the husband attempts to control his wife's ability to attend school by limiting the money available for her tuition. A 31 year old woman who was married to a high school teacher talks about herself and her feelings about power.

Ann, 31, is quiet and reflective. Since her divorce she has been living in a non-marital committed relationship. (She was included with

separated women in the data analysis as she is not currently living with the man to whom she was married at the time she returned to school. All the data reported refer to the marriage.) Ann has four children, the youngest two are the offspring of the man she has been living with. The baby is only about five weeks old.

According to Ann she had been an intellectual, rebellious youth. She ran away from home when she was 18. Since she was no longer a minor her parents had her declared emotionally incompetent and brought back home. This was followed by a brief involuntary psychiatric hospitalization. Ann stated that she established her adulthood the way so many young women feel forced to: she became pregnant, married, and exchanged her parent's supervision for her husband's.

Ann reports that she returned to school because the isolation of childcare was making her "go bananas." Her husband supported her decision to return. She explains:

He agreed that I really did need to do something. I mean it was a manifest truth that I was going nuts and that I was becoming hard to live with. So he was really happy about it at first. I mean I do have to give him that. He was concerned about me and he didn't want me to be a crazy person. He didn't think I was going to take it as seriously as I did. And I took it real serious.

Note that in the last two sentences the respondent identifies the potential catalyst for marital conflict. Like Karen in the previous example she too began to take her own needs seriously. Ann further explains what happened when she took it "real serious."

Mike paid for it (school) that first time. In fact, throughout that first year the question of money didn't come up until after he started

to get very hostile about it and then he said we couldn't afford it any more. He was very threatened. I did very well in school. He kept talking about how he wanted me to drop out. He wouldn't pay for my school which I had just accepted at the time. I didn't ever occur to me that any of the money that he earned was mine. It was all his. There was nothing that I did obviously. It didn't occur to me that my staying home and taking care of the kids was worth anything financially. In fact, I had to drop out of school for a whole semester because I couldn't pay the tuition. And every summer I had to work to make enough money on my own to pay for my tuition and lots of times I just couldn't get it together because I'd always be spending the money on food and stuff during the summer and then I wouldn't have enough when the fall semester came.

I believe that statement is a very clear reflection of how traditional power works. However, Ann was able to act autonomously in her own behalf. She reports that she was the one who paid the bills and managed the checkbook. One day, she said, she realized that she could just write the check for her tuition without his permission. She tells us:

It did get to the point where the last semester that I was in school, that I was with Mike, I just wrote a check for the tuition. We had a joint checking account and I just wrote it even though he had expressly said, "you can't do it." He owed it to me.

While Mike had seen the money as all his, Ann didn't seek to redefine it as all hers. She didn't take it all -- only what she viewed as hers.

Ann has no desire to remarry at the present time because remarriage would mean giving up the state and federal aid she receives and make her once again dependent on a male.

In this final example the woman talks about how her tuition is paid. Hannah, 37, is an anxious, feisty woman -- the mother of 4 children. She has an interdisciplinary major. Her claim to independence is clear and direct. Her husband pays her tuition. He has to, or else.

It didn't at first (present any problems). But I've changed a lot since I've come back to school. Sometimes it presents a problem because he brings it up like he's doing me a big favor. When I first came back he was rather proud of what I was doing. But after I started changing then everything changed. The relationship, everything changed. I gained more self-confidence. I still don't have that much but I gained some. And I decided that I'm a mother, but I'm not really a mother the way mothers are defined by society and culture. I decided I didn't like my role as wife and mother. I want to get out of it as soon as possible. I'm not making too many waves. But if I have to I will. I've told him that if he refuses to pay (tuition) I'd walk out and that's it. Because I have such a strong desire to finish, that if he wouldn't do it I'd go on welfare, get financial aid, whatever had to be done, I'd do it.

I believe that this example, as well as the others, clearly points out how changes in a wife's self-concept can act as a catalyst for power struggles. In reaction to changes in her self-concept and commitments (and not necessarily in her behavior) we see the beginning of a traditional power struggle. The examples illustrated several women's responses to that process. While the solutions shown are dramatic, good for illustration, they are not inconsistent with the underlying power dynamic that many of the respondents described.

Moreover, in some instances, it was this chain of actions and reactions that served as a catalyst for the women's continuing metamorphosis.

Division of Domestic Labor

In addition to power struggles over tuition many women reported increased conflict over housework. The distribution of patterns of household responsibility for both intact marriages, and separated couples prior to their separation is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Division of Labor

Number of Marriages				
Marital Status	Traditional	Shared	Egalitarian	Counter-Traditional
Separated	7	0	0	0
Married	4	2	1	1

Patterns of responsibility from housework ranged from traditional to counter-traditional. In traditional marriages the wife has sole responsibility for childcare and household tasks. The male is the only or principal wage earner. Two of the women included in this pattern also work part-time outside the home in order to pay for tuition. None of the women had paid domestic help.

Shared and Egalitarian patterns of housework differ in that in the shared pattern the wife retains the responsibility for all the planning. Thus, although either spouse might do the laundry she decides when it has to be done, and sees to it that the necessary laundry supplies are on hand.

Counter-traditional pattern is defined as one in which the partners exchange domestic roles. Both are employed. He is a "househusband."

From the data presented in Table 4 we can see that the married respondents had some variation in patterns of responsibility for domestic labor. While the greatest number are concentrated in the traditional category, some couples share or reverse domestic roles. In contrast, all the separated respondents had had traditional patterns for doing housework. From the data presented in Table 4 it would be false to assume that "traditional" patterns for the division of labor lead to marital separation. We need to consider the possibility that some couples are unable to talk and/or value each other, in general, and not just around housework. In that case housework could be a symptom and not a cause of conflict. In the following discussion we will focus on power struggles that arose within the traditional pattern for the division of labor.

It is only in the now defunct marriages that the traditional pattern of domestic labor became a focus of power struggles. Several of the separated women reported that it was her husband's unwillingness to compromise and cooperate that became a major factor in her decision to terminate the marriage. Most often, however, power struggles over housework were minimal or just didn't happen. Many of the women reported that they knew that it wouldn't do any good to suggest a different arrangement and that they had not brought the topic up with their husbands. Frequently these women expressed a

more generalized dissatisfaction with the marriage and talked openly of anger, resentment of and resignation to the status quo. She further expressed her desire to get out of the marriage as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

The following is an example of a "traditional" marriage. It is an extreme example and there had been some discussion as to whether or not it should be classified as traditional or more appropriately "slave labor." However, that was not an available category. I believe that this couple presents a particularly fine example of what I will call a "power paradox." If we attempted to assess the power balance by examining decision-making, the wife would come out with a fairly high degree of interpersonal power. She had control over decisions affecting most aspects of domestic life. She made all the frequent and unimportant decisions, while her spouse made the infrequent but important decisions that shaped the direction of their lives and her decisions. Furthermore, she didn't want the responsibility for all of life's mundane matters but felt unable to do anything about it. In this case we can see where her power (read autonomy) is inversely linked to the husband's interpersonal power.

Karen (the 37 year old divorced mother of teenagers who "secretly used" a share of the family finances for tuition) talks about responsibilities in the house and of her anger with the situation.

He never helped with anything. He knew I was going to school. His business was well established already. He was making money. He just wouldn't do anything. I had to do everything. I had every responsibility in the house. I mean even fixing

the toilet, hammering nails, putting screws in and fixing doors. Besides all the childcare, all the marketing and cooking. He wouldn't do anything. I mean not even outside the house. Not even mowing grass. That's the way it was. I couldn't change it. I tried but it just couldn't be changed. That was one of the reasons for the divorce.

It is important to recognize that the husband's behavior did not begin when Karen entered school but had been a long established family pattern. However, Karen reports that it was only when she went back to school that she began to confront what she felt were the inequities in their relationship. I believe her statement reflects a frustrating and painful experience. From it we can come to understand why a woman's power frequently comes to be linked with her ability to reject total responsibility for the tasks that have traditionally been used to circumscribe women's lives: housework and childcare.

In the following example a 30 year old woman talks about her feelings of "powerlessness" around housework.

I did everything. When I suggested that he do a little bit of the cooking I remember he said that he didn't want to develop a frying pan mentality. Some bullshit like that. I was outraged because what it amounted to was it was alright for me to spend all my time doing it, but he wouldn't do any at all because it would be debasing. I kept pushing and pushing...And when I finally realized that he really meant that, I decided to leave him.

In contrast to the two previous examples in which the woman was only able to resolve her "powerlessness" by leaving the marriage, the woman in the following tells of how domestic quarrels sometimes ended with her husband doing some of the work.

I started to go back to school. That made the difference. I just couldn't do everything and he finally got tired of the mess. We had fights over it. The house would be a mess and he would say, "you know I'm sick of seeing this place in such a mess. Do something about it." And I would say, "well, I can't do it and I'm not going to be able to until I get this paper finished. I have to take care of the kids, I've got to cook, I have to do the rest of the stuff. I can't do what you want." So we would have a fight about it and then he would usually do it.

In the following example the couple solve domestic labor problems by reversing roles. The wife has neither the time nor the desire to do housework. She attends school full time and works part-time. Her husband's occupation is centered around the house and he has free time. She talks about their relationship in the following way:

He knows I hate cooking and he just does it out of survival. He likes to cook. He's very creative about it. Far as doing the house: he's happy I'm so engrossed with my schoolwork that he doesn't mind doing the housework.

One cannot help but be struck by the similarity to the arguments frequently given as to why women should do housework and childcare: they are better at it, "I'm engrossed in my work," etc. Given that similarity we might wonder if issues of autonomy and power arise for the husband in this example. While I have no data I would predict that a male in this situation would be likely to experience much less concern over power than a female, in that he does this somewhat out of choice and not out of sense of expectations and role assignment. What that means is that he can give up his role as "househusband" without experiencing guilt and disapproval from his peers and society at large. This freedom of choice is likely to make him feel more autonomous and more powerful.

How much freedom of choice concerning role expectations do women have? Can they reject some of the stereotypic notions of what a woman is and should be? Can they make a commitment to their self development and in that commitment become more autonomous? The preceeding has demonstrated that some women can and do reject the feminine stereotype and claim power for themselves. Why we might wonder does the emotional cost need be so high?

In this final section we have explored the role of autonomy in marital power conflicts. Drawing on the vignettes we were able to see that autonomy is frequently an unrecognized component of marital power dynamics. In many of the cases presented it was clear that the wife did not lack power in the traditional sense. She had control over many decisions affecting the needs of her family. The cases demonstrated, however, that the women did lack autonomy. In many cases it was their claim to their autonomy that generated power struggles.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The study presented here is an initial exploratory study suggesting an alternative approach to the study of marital power. Heretofore, marital power had been defined as dominance and had been assessed as the amount of control one spouse exercised over the other. Measurement had largely been confined to decision-making indices such as choice of a car or an item of furniture. In the alternative view suggested here, power has two aspects: 1) control over others, and 2) control over self. That is, power is defined in terms of autonomy and dominance. Frieze, McHugh and Rose (1978) and Miller (1976) have suggested independently that a power analysis in terms of autonomy would be essential to fully understand marital interactions and women's public role. To my knowledge, this is the first attempt at such an approach.

The data support the primary expectation that autonomy is an unrecognized component of marital power dynamics. Furthermore, the data indicate that a model of power that includes autonomy is the more appropriate one for the assessment and understanding of women's power or lack of it. A model of power that includes autonomy can illuminate the discrepancy usually found between the level of power attributed to women and the amount of power women report (Turk and Bell, 1963). Power researchers frequently "give" more power to subject wives than the wives estimate they have. The data from the

present study indicates that observed power, in terms of decision-making, is separate from the experiential reality of autonomy. The data also indicate that it is a woman's personal experience of autonomy that determines her behavior and her self definition.

There are systematic relationships between a woman's sense of power and a number of demographic, personality, and other psychological variables. Greater numbers of children and husbands with higher levels of education adversely affect a woman's feeling of power. Marital satisfaction and independence are also factors related to a woman's power. Furthermore, a woman's claim to autonomy and power are related to increasing marital instability. Contrary to traditional power theory the degree of control a woman had over others, in terms of decision-making regarding household and nurturant functions, was unrelated to her experience of power.

The examination of personality and social psychological characteristics which might be related to autonomy were beyond the scope of this study. However, an exploration of these characteristics would provide interesting and possibly pertinent information. For example, is autonomy related to achievement motivation or androgyny? Does a Mother's employment outside the home have an effect on a daughter's autonomy in adulthood? What is the relationship of race and social class of family of origin to a woman's experience of autonomous power?

There are several notes of caution which I must add: First, there is the question as to how to interpret data given by a respondent about a personally involving matter such as this. There is some indication in the social psychological literature, of a discrepancy

between what spouses say about themselves, as compared to what their partners say about them (Heer, 1962, 1963; Levinger, 1966). We might also wonder if women are as dissatisfied with their wife/mother roles as indicated. We might also question whether autonomy is as salient as indicated in the data. With respect to the salience of autonomy I asked the respondents to recall childhood "heroes." These data, which one might expect would be less subject to social desirability responses, were very parallel to those asked with regard to their own conjugal power relationship. Thus, in the marriages in which autonomy was or became a source of conflict the wife reported that she had long had an inner striving for independence. For example, they identified as heroes people who excelled, a famous uncle, Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy, and Wonder women. The other women could identify no heroes or named teachers, a grandmother because she was kind, or a minister. Susan, reflecting on how little she had changed although her way of relating to her husband was markedly different since she returned to school reported:

I had no idea of what I would become. I felt kind of surprized at myself when I think back on that person. Really, I'm not that different. The things that I am were there all along. I've just become more courageous about expressing who I am. And I really didn't expect that. I think I expected some kind of radical change.

The question might also be raised as to the actual salience of autonomy/power issues in the marital interactions. If autonomy was salient for all couples why did some marriages founder and not others? Levinger (1976) suggests that couples stay together or separate based on the relative strength of attractions within the marriage, barriers

to leaving, and alternative attractions outside the marriage. High earnings power would be considered an attraction. A barrier might be religious convictions that forbid divorce. An example of alternatives might be the availability of a more desirable sexual partner. In the following discussion I wish to put aside the notion of love and take a more pragmatic perspective.

Two variables that have been suggested as barrier forces for women are children and husband's status. The more children and the higher the status the greater the barrier. This theoretical notion appears to have been supported in this study. The women who remained in their marriages have more than twice as many children than the women who separated. Even if it were economically feasible, the prospect of assuming total responsibility for childcare could understandably limit a woman's options. Indeed, social psychological research indicated that the larger the number of children a woman has the smaller her options and alternatives are outside marriage and therefore the less likely she is to seek a divorce (Heer, 1962; Levinger, 1966).

The data also indicate that the husband's status might have acted as a barrier to separation regardless of the power conflicts. The husbands of the married women are successful academics and/or professionals. However, most of the separated women described their former husbands as academic failures (even acknowledging a universal tendency to disparage one's former spouse -- the marital history indicates some validity in their descriptions). For example, the two former husbands who had gone to college were either underemployed or chronically

unemployed. Since these husbands had less status and earning power these women had less to give up economically. Additionally the wife's returning to school gave her more status than her husband. Within our culture marriages in which wives have higher status than husbands violate cultural norms that men have higher status than women. Marriages in which wives have more education and status than husbands are unstable and prone to divorce (Komarovsky, 1964).

Shared interests and communication might be considered attractions to a marriage. With less educated husbands the wife's return to school might have forced the couple apart in their ability to share interest and ideas. By contrast, the more educated husbands might have supported and encouraged their wives to acquire a comparative level of education, or at least not have been opposed to it. Her education could make her a better companion. This new found companionship would explain why some couples did not separate despite increased conflict over power issues. However, there is also the possibility that the marriages have been based (in part) on the husband's and/or wife's needs that are fulfilled by having a much less or much more educated spouse (Hass, 1978). If that were so, the wife's education would have the effect of driving the couple further apart. Conversations with the two women who had separated since the initial interview highlight the importance of this dynamic in the marital separation. These two women (both married to professionals) suggest that it was when they began to make "real" changes in values and ideas, when school became a self involving goal rather than an escape or a "course," when she began to demonstrate academic excellence and feel competent

that "all hell broke loose."

The third force that Levinger (1976) suggests are alternatives to the current relationship. When women return to school they are likely to increase their contact with potential alternative partners. This seems to be supported in the present study. One woman is currently living with a former professor. Two other women reported having had "important" live affairs. In one instance it was the precipitating factor in the marital separation. In the other the affair became an additional factor in an increasingly unstable marriage that has terminated since the initial interview. From a marital interaction perspective it seems quite likely that the wife's affair (whether talked about or not) generated additional marital tension. This tension could have surfaced covertly in tuition and domestic labor conflicts.

We might also speculate that the reasons that some couples separate might be based on the husband's lack of flexibility. Around the issue of housework, for example, almost all the husbands appear to be rather inflexible. The difference in current marital status lies in the willingness of the wife to accomodate to her husband's unwillingness to change. There is some indication in the family literature that higher status, middle class professional men are likely to espouse a belief in marital equality. However, in reality, because of the "importance" of their work they do little or no housework (Gillespie, 1971). Because of their husband's status, control of resources, political and interpersonal power wives are reluctant to demand that they do such "unimportant" work like the laundry.

This seems to be supported in the present study. For example, all of the married women (high status husbands) who had been doing all the domestic labor continued to do so despite their increasingly heavy academic responsibilities. However, when issues of autonomy that were centered around housework came up with women with lower status husbands the wife was less likely to be accomodating and more likely to insist on a more equitable distribution of household tasks. In some instances, if the husband maintained his anti-housework stance the wife left.

A further question suggested by the data concerns the relationship between low autonomy and depression. We might also wonder if the respondent's mental health "problems" are representative of married women in general. The data indicates that low autonomy women are likely to report symptoms of clinical depression and severe mental health problems. Therefore, it seems important to understand how this pattern of psychopathology fits into concerns over power.

Concerning low autonomy or "powerlessness" I would like to suggest that "learned helplessness" (Seligman, 1972) can be viewed as the opposing end of a continuum with autonomy. Learned helplessness suggest that when an organism is unable to have a modifying effect on the environment (particularly as related to the avoidance of adverse stimuli) the organism learns to stop trying and to be "helpless." Seligman has linked learned helplessness to female depression. He posits that women acquire a "helpless" attitude through their social interaction in which they have very little control over the outcome of events affecting their lives. Seligman further demon-

strates that an inability to control events in one's personal domain frequently leads to evidence of clinical depression. Langer (1978) suggests that labeling an individual as being inferior or as having inferior status makes her or him less likely to perform up to her or his potential. Furthermore, this individual is likely to develop symptoms akin to clinical depression found in housewives. That women frequently use and are rewarded for using "helpless" strategies has been well documented (Berkowitz and Daniels, 1963; Johnson, 1974).

The link between female depression and marriage has been demonstrated by clinical data (Grove, 1973) and sociological surveys (Bernard, 1973, 1978). There is a rather strong indication in the literature of the negative impact of marriage on women's mental health. Married women fare worse than single women, single men and married males in terms of mental health problems. The group with the least problems are married men (Bernard, 1973). In a more recent study Bernard (1978) indicates that never married women (head of household earning more than \$16,000 -- this is professional working women) have mental health indicators that put them in the same range or above married males. Divorced women fare far worse, however, not as poorly as divorced males. From this we can conclude that the respondents are not different from married women in general. Furthermore, we can conclude that there is a relationship between a lack of power for women and the manifestation of severe depression.

Family power theorists have generally failed to deal with these complex issues and probably will continue to ignore them as long as

they confine themselves solely to the study of dominance power. A uni-dimensional view of power ignores the crucial issues of women's development which are being passionately re-examined today.

Furthermore, these researchers on family power continue to limit their theoretical development by hemming themselves in the more restricted methodology of the forced-choice survey instrument. Research findings based on traditional methodologies imply that if women are active in decision-making they are equal to men and thus should have no complaints. However, these findings tell us nothing of the personal experience of power at a more general level or of the operation of dominance/submission in daily life.

The most needed improvement in research on family power probably basically depends upon changing the methods of investigation. More open-ended interviews should supplement large scale surveys even at the expense of some scientific accuracy. Furthermore, interviews should be expanded to include discussion with both husbands and wives so that new hypotheses can be generated which supplement the traditional dominance equals power theory. It is only then that this area of investigation can begin to close the gap between theory and the reality of married life.

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DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

January 6, 1977

I am a doctoral student in psychology interested in talking with women who have returned to school after an interruption in their formal education. I too am a "non-traditional" student and would like to explore with you your life and your family's life since you have returned to the university.

Your participation would be most helpful in giving me the fullest and most accurate picture of the experience women face when they return to school. When the project is completed I will provide feedback to all the women who participated. I will telephone you in several days to find out if you are interested in being interviewed.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Very sincerely,

Barbara Brooks

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- A. 1. What's it like for you being a student? What do you like best about it? What do you dislike the most? Has the experience been about what you expected it to be, or different in some way(s)? How?
2. What made you decide to return to school? Did you consider any other schools? Why UMass?
3. How do you finance your schooling? (Probe for own savings, earnings, past or present. Spouse and self feelings about spending money for her schooling?)
4. When you first decided to return to school, how did your immediate family feel about it? (Probe separately re: husband, children, parents.) How do they feel now? (If different: why do you think they changed their feeling about this?)
5. What were your educational and career goals when you first returned? What are they now? (Why different, if they are?)

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about the years you were growing up and the time before you went back to school.

- B. 1. Where there any special people you admired when you were growing up? (Probe re: relationship to her; what qualities she admired; did she want to have those qualities herself?) Did you think you would eventually have that quality?
2. Were there any special people you very much disliked when you were growing up? Who were they? Why disliked?
3. I'd like to know what kind of work for wages you've done since high school? (Get sequence.)
4. How old were you when you married? Your husband? How long did you know each other before you married? How long have you been married? Do you have any children? How old? What sex? Your husband's occupation? (then and now)
5. What impact did the marriage have on your work/household patterns from before the marriage? (residence, financial, work - degree of independence in each)

6. Before you started school, were you active in PTA, community or church organizations? Did you have hobbies or special interests? Are you still involved in any of these activities?

Now I'd like to ask you some general questions about yourself.

- C. 1. Are you aware of any recent changes in your deeper sense of yourself? How do you feel about yourself? In what way has being back in school had a role in this? (if all positive upbeat - probe re: has school been at all threatening to her sense of herself. If all negative - probe re: any positive contributions in being back in school.)
2. What difference has your being an older student made? Are you ever mistaken for an instructor? Does this please you? Do you think more is expected of you (or less) just because you are a more mature student?
3. Are you satisfied with your work? Are others (teachers, husband, peers)?
4. Has anyone been particularly encouraging to you since you returned to school? In what ways? (probe re: spouse, instructors, counselors, other student(s), women generally, friend(s).)
5. Do you have contact with other women who have returned to school? What do such contacts mean to you? Do you support each other? How? Does talking with them make you feel MORE or LESS confident of yourself as a returning student? As a woman?
6. What effect has your being back in school had upon other people's attitude toward you? (spouse, children, friend, relative) (probe re: respect - status)
7. If you had an opportunity to do something truly rewarding yet it conflicted with your husband's wish would you go ahead anyway, or honor his wishes?
8. What do you plan to do when you graduate? What kinds of conflicts and/or benefits do you anticipate? Have you communicated your plans to your family?
9. How determined do you think a woman has to be in order to successfully return to school?
10. Can you describe one particularly salient event or feeling that happened to you since returning to school?

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about your marriage

- D.
1. How are household tasks, childcare divided? How was that arrangement decided upon? Are you satisfied with the arrangement? What changes would you like? (probe for change in division of labor since return to school and how family members feel about that)
 2. What are some positive things (or negative) about family doing more for themselves or each other?
 3. How do you arrange time for schoolwork, studying? Time pressure of exam week?
 4. How are decisions concerning money usually made? How did this arrangement come about? Are you satisfied with the arrangement?
 5. Every marriage has periods of stress and adjustment. Can you describe a minor conflict and how it was resolved? Now can you describe a reoccurring conflict?
 6. In what way, if any, did your relationship to your husband change when you returned to school? (time together, sex, communication)
 7. Is there anything you would like to add that would give me a greater understanding of who you are?
 8. Why did you agree to do this interview?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

I have a number of questions I would like for us to talk about. While some of the questions are simple, for example, "how long have you been married?", some of the questions might concern issues you have not thought about before. If you should feel any discomfort please say so and I'll respond to any questions you might have. You are free to withdraw and to discontinue your participation at any time. Talking about what the experience of returning to school has been like for you will hopefully help clarify some concerns and questions you might have been thinking about.

In addition to the interview there will be two simple forms for you to complete.

APPENDIX D

FEEDBACK

While attending two different universities during the past several years I became aware of the ever increasing number of adult women on campus. When I talked with academic counselors and to the women with whom I became acquainted many of them commented on the familial hostility and lack of support women experienced following their decision to return to school. This project is to try to explore the interaction of adulthood, academics and marriage; to recognize that what we have tended to view as our individual problem is in reality a public issue.

A main hypothesis of the project is that much of the "problems" that occur stem from a woman's changing self-concept particularly around issues of competence. The two forms you filled out were designed to help me get a sense of the changes you see in yourself.

When the study is completed, written summaries of the data will be shared with you.

Thank you very much for sharing your experience with me.

Barbara Brooks

APPENDIX E
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE
PRE-SCHOOL AUTONOMY

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number of Women</u>	
	<u>High Autonomy</u>	<u>Low Autonomy</u>
Under 30	1	1
30-34	1	6
35-39	1	3
40-45	1	1
Total	4	11

The mean age for High Autonomy women was 34.0, for Low Autonomy, 33.5.

<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>High Autonomy</u>	<u>Low Autonomy</u>
Married	1	6
Remarried	0	1
Total	1	7
Divorced	3	2
Separated	0	2
Widowed	0	0
Total	3	4
	4	11

<u>Age at Marriage</u>		
<u>Age</u>	<u>High Autonomy</u>	<u>Low Autonomy</u>
Under 20	2	4
20-25	2	5
25 +	0	2

The mean age at marriage for High Autonomy women was 20, for Low Autonomy, 21.7.

Number of Year Married Prior to Entering School

<u>Year</u>	<u>High Autonomy</u>	<u>Low Autonomy</u>
Under 10	2	7
10+	2	4

Age When Entering School

<u>Age</u>	<u>High Autonomy</u>	<u>Low Autonomy</u>
Under 30	2	6
30+	2	5

Number of Children When Entering School

<u>Age</u>	<u>High Autonomy</u>	<u>Low Autonomy</u>
Under 10	3	14
10+	6	7

Husband's Education

	<u>High Autonomy</u>	<u>Low Autonomy</u>
High School	3	2
College +	1	9

APPENDIX F
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE
BY MARITAL STATUS

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number of Women</u>	
	Married	Separated
Under 30	1	1
30-34	3	4
35-39	3	1
40-45	1	1

The mean age for all the women in the study was 33.7. The average age for married women was 34.5, for separated women, 32.7.

Marital Status

Married	7	
Remarried	1	
Total		8
Divorced	5	
Separated	2	
Widowed	0	
Total		7
		<hr/> 15

Age at Marriage

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number of Women</u>	
	Married	Separated
Under 20	4	2
20-25	3	4
25+	1	1

The average age at marriage for married women was 20.75, for separated women, 21.85.

Number of Year Married Prior to Entering School

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Women</u>	
	<u>Married</u>	<u>Separated</u>
Under 10	4	5
30+	4	2

Age When Entering School

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number of Women</u>	
	<u>Married</u>	<u>Separated</u>
Under 30	3	5
30+	5	2

Prior School Experience

	<u>Married</u>	<u>Separated</u>
Secretarial School	1	0
College	2	3
Art School	1	2
Nurses Training	3	1
None	1	1

Prior Work Experience

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>Separated</u>
Factory	0	3
Clerical, other	7	3
Human Service	1	1

Current Course of Study

<u>Major</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>Separated</u>
Humanities	1	2
Social Science	3	5
Biological Science	2	0
Education	2	0

